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# Start Building Peace in Congo at the Grass-Roots Level

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International organizations must revise their approach to Congo.

Western and African diplomats, United Nations peacekeepers, and many nongovernmental organizations tend to view the current fighting exclusively as a consequence of national and international tensions -- especially power struggles among Congolese and foreign elites -- or as a spillover from the Rwandan genocide. And they typically consider intervention at the national or regional levels to be their only legitimate responsibility.

International peace-builders must follow the lead of crucial local groups to invest in solving Congolese conflicts from the bottom up.

This approach ignores the distinctly local conflicts that drive a large part of the violence, including tensions over land, grass-roots power and status, cattle, charcoal, timber, drugs and taxation at checkpoints. These local antagonisms fuel national and regional conflicts. They regularly jeopardize progress made at the macro levels.

In addition to supporting national and international reconciliation, foreign peace-builders must start tackling conflicts from the bottom up. Local groups should lead such efforts. But since they often lack the funding, logistical means or technical capacity to implement programs, international donors should assist them.

Two areas are especially critical, as they drive most ongoing local conflicts: land disputes and tensions over local power. For ideas on how to address these issues, international peace-builders can look at the work of the [Life and Peace Institute](#) and its Congolese partners. The approach is simple: put grass-roots actors in the driver's seat. Let them decide how they want to resolve their antagonisms. Then provide them with the financial, technical and logistical support they need to implement their peace plans.

Giving grass-roots peace-builders adequate support will require international agencies to create new departments, new expertise, new standard operating procedures and new funding instruments. This process will be challenging, costly and time-consuming. But it is the only way to finally help the Congolese build a sustainable peace.

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